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U.S., Soviets Exchange Data on Missile Forces

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U.S. and Soviet officials meeting in Geneva yesterday swapped information about each side's missile forces, an exchange that U.S. officials believe indicates Moscow means to continue respecting at least the initial arms limitation pact signed by the two superpowers.

Sources said the Soviets provided information about the dismantling of some older Yankee-class, missile-firing submarines as newer vessels enter their fleet.

The United States reported on initial steps toward retiring some older Polaris missile subs to make room for the Navy's new Trident submarine that will go on sea trials next year.

The first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) was signed by the superpowers in 1972 and was the first step toward applying ceilings on the atomic arsenals of both countries.

Under terms of that agreement, each side is required to account for older missiles replaced with more modern ones.

The SALT I pact, however, expired in 1977. And, while President Carter and Soviet chief Leonid Brezhnev signed a SALT II pact in June 1979, it has not been ratified by Congress. The question of whether the Soviets would continue to abide by the restraints of these treaties has become an important one in arms control circles.

U.S. officials said that while the exchange of data yesterday is no guarantee of future Soviet compliance, it could be seen as at least a reassuring sign that the Kremlin has not given up on the SALT process.

Informants said there was no discussion of alleged Soviet violations of the SALT agreement because the administration apparently does not consider various press and congressional reports of violations to have been, in fact, violations.

Officials said that many of these published reports either were in error, were old charges that had previously been looked into, or were not actual violations.

Recent charges of Soviet SALT violations by Rep. Robin Beard Jr. (R-Tenn.), however, have caused the administration considerable concern and have touched off an investigation of Beard by the House Armed Services Committee.

Beard charged that the Soviets, in July, "conducted an exercise over a five-day period in which they simulated the reloading of 25 to 40 SS-13 missile silos."

The SS-13 is Moscow's biggest missile and a rapid reload on missile silos is prohibited under SALT II.

Administration officials contend that Beard's charges are inaccurate. Privately, however, the real fuss is over a possible compromise of intelligence sources because the United States apparently did detect signs that the Soviets were simulating such activity.

Some officials argue that it is no violation because it was truly a simulation in that no missiles were moved and it was not rapid, in the sense that it apparently took more than five days.

The U.S.-Soviet discussions in Geneva involve the Standing Consultative Committee, which was set up under the initial agreement and which meets periodically to discuss SALT issues.